Executive Summary[1] of Findings and Recommendations: An Action Plan for the Renewal of Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL Programming in Manitoba

December 2003

Accessibility, Excellence, and Equity

[1] The full report is available on the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth website: <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/diversity/esl/index.html>

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Preface

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth values the linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes our communities and schools. We are committed to providing inclusive and equitable learning environments and programming for all students. The provision of effective Kindergarten to Senior 4 English as a Second Language (ESL) programming is an essential element of this goal.

Introduction

Our schools reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity that has been, and will continue to be, an important aspect of our society. ESL learners represent a significant and growing body of students in our schools. We know, from experience and from decades of educational research, that appropriate and equitable programming is essential for these learners. It is therefore important that Manitoba continue to improve ESL programming by addressing challenges, building on experience and successes, and applying contemporary educational research.

Background

In Manitoba, over 450 public schools and approximately one quarter of Independent schools reported having ESL learners within the last three school years. While many ESL learners are Canadian citizens who were born in Canada, many others are newcomers to Manitoba. Immigration has and will continue to play an increasingly important role in our economic and social development. In fact, Manitoba has made a commitment to doubling the number of immigrants who choose our province as a place to live and work.

In 2001-2002, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth launched a review of ESL programming as part of the implementation of the priorities identified in the *K-S4 Education Agenda for Student Success*. The intent was to focus attention on the needs of diverse learners, and re-energize efforts aimed at reducing educational disparities. The primary goal is to find ways to strengthen ESL programming in Manitoba schools.

The ESL Program Review ("the Review") was undertaken by a team representing the Departments of Education, Citizenship and Youth, Advanced Education and Training, and Labour and Immigration.

Consultation

During 2001-2002, a survey focusing on current practices and challenges was completed. The survey gathered data from superintendents/directors of school divisions, principals of public schools reporting ESL learners in the 2000-2001 school year, and principals of Independent and First Nations schools. A summary report of the survey results and the full version of this report are available on Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth's website at: <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/cur/diversity/esl/index.html>.

During 2002-2003, the ESL Program Review team held 16 consultation sessions attended by approximately 200 individuals, including teachers, principals, divisional administrators, representatives of educational associations, and students. The sessions addressed all aspects of Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL programming in the province, and sought views on what is working and what needs improvement. School divisions, educators, and interested individuals were invited to make written submissions.

Key Findings

Although many schools and school divisions have developed successful programming and instructional models that serve as a good base to strengthen and build on ESL programming, a number of key findings were identified through the consultation process which may require further action.

Defining ESL Learners

- There is a need to more accurately distinguish between ESL learners, English as Second Dialect (ESD) learners, and students for whom English is their first language but who have limited literacy skills or language experiences.
- There is a need to develop a common provincial definition of an ESL learner that can be used as the basis for determining who will benefit from ESL programming and who is eligible for it. In light of concerns raised concerning the limitations and connotations associated with the term ESL, there may be a need for a more accurate and inclusive term, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL), as is the case in British Columbia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and increasingly in international settings.

Identification, Assessment, and Monitoring of ESL Learners

- More accurate screening processes and tools for determining students' proficiency in their dominant language(s)—be it English or another language(s)—are essential. Although some schools have developed effective identification and assessment processes, a common reception and intake protocol, as well as common identification, assessment, and monitoring tools are desirable.

Linguistic Diversity and Aboriginal Learners

- Aboriginal learners are an important component of the rich linguistic and cultural diversity of our schools and communities. 2001 Census information suggests that approximately 30% of Aboriginal learners enter the school system with an Aboriginal language as their first language, or perhaps as bilingual speakers, and therefore ESL learners. However, the majority of Aboriginal students enter school with English as their "mother tongue" or dominant language.
- Aboriginal educators in Manitoba, as well as researchers and educators in other jurisdictions, have suggested that some Aboriginal learners whose first language is English may, in fact, speak a dialect of English that has been significantly influenced by an Aboriginal language. These learners may also benefit from ESL programming and instructional approaches. There is a need for more accurate information, however, on the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners and the prevalence of ESL and English as a Second Dialect (ESD) factors among the Aboriginal student population.
- Most instructional approaches targeted to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners have been English first language "enrichment" approaches, rather than second language acquisition or ESL approaches. There is a need to develop effective programming and instructional approaches that recognize the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners, and that are culturally appropriate and informed by second language research and experience.

More Accessible, Consistent, and Effective Programming

- Although classroom integration with differentiated instruction is the most common form of ESL programming offered in Manitoba schools, generally there is a lack of formalized programming. A great deal of ESL programming has been undertaken in the form of "resource teaching." Participants attested to the importance of "whole school" approaches in building effective ESL programming.

- There was strong support for the development of a formalized provincial ESL programming framework and implementation guide, which would allow for programming flexibility to meet a range of learner needs.

Funding for ESL Programming

- The following funding concerns were identified: (i) amount of funding per student; (ii) duration of funding eligibility; (iii) difficulties that flow from basing funding on September 30 enrolment data; and (iv) accountability for the use of ESL funding. There were several calls for provincial monitoring of ESL learners and their progress through the Education Information System, and the use of Individual Education Plans for planning programming.

Building Greater Capacity to Respond to ESL Learner Needs

- Many teachers assigned to ESL programs have limited formal ESL or second language training. Currently, classroom and resource teachers are delivering the majority of ESL programming—only a few schools or school divisions reported employing ESL specialists. Manitoba faculties of education provide courses in ESL and second language teaching methodologies, but these are not mandatory; thus there was strong support for enhancing professional development opportunities for teachers. Some participants called for mandatory ESL training for all pre-service teachers, and the creation of provincial ESL specialist teacher qualifications.
- School plans should address issues of staffing, specific programming, and parental involvement to support ESL learners. The need to develop strong divisional- and school-based resource and materials collections was identified as an important priority.
- There is a need for divisions to provide ESL supports such as specialist positions or divisional ESL teams or networks, teacher professional development opportunities, and division-based resources and support materials. Other initiatives, which were supported as vehicles for strengthening the capacity of school divisions to provide ESL programming, were: (i) collaborative strategies, such as across-divisional development and offering of ESL programming, or sharing of divisional ESL specialist services; and (ii) clustering ESL students, or creating "ESL centres of excellence" or designated schools when divisional size, location, and/or a low ESL student population make it difficult to offer a significant level of support.

- The need to encourage and enhance community access and parental involvement through initiatives such as community liaison officers and the provision of translators or interpreters was highlighted.
- Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth should play a leadership and coordinating role in developing a stronger provincial approach and base for ESL programming, especially in terms of increasing the capacity for ESL programming within the Department, and in the development of a provincial "programming framework" and a series of specialized provincial ESL courses, implementation manuals, and related resources.

Building Support for Refugee and War-Affected Learners

- Learners and schools face significant challenges when adolescent ESL students enter the school system with limited first language literacy skills and with significant academic gaps due to disrupted schooling. Students from refugee and war-affected backgrounds often have complex social and emotional needs which, if unmet or unresolved, may affect their ability or preparedness to learn. Hence, there is a need to develop more intensive programs specifically targeted to meet the needs of ESL learners of refugee and war-affected origins, especially adolescents and young adults.

Recommendations

The ESL Program Review Committee has responded to the Review with the following recommendations. Collectively, they are intended to provide for the elements of a multi-year action plan that may form the basis of a provincial strategy that will strengthen ESL programming in Manitoba. The action plan aspires to enhance **accessibility**, ensure **excellence** in ESL programming, and create more **equitable** school and learning environments.

1. The Department develop a provincial ESL programming framework that could include
   - a policy statement based on the concept that ESL is an "additive" second language learning process, intended to provide transitional programming for English as an Additional Language learners
   - a provincial ESL learner reception and assessment protocol, and instruments for the screening, initial assessment, and monitoring of ESL learners

- a provincial ESL curriculum "companion" document which would serve as a guide for adapting and differentiating instruction for ESL learners as they move through various stages of their ESL development, and for developing specialized ESL programming and courses
- a support document and sample Individual Education Plans for Senior Years ESL learners, to support the implementation of ESL or "E" designated courses
- a series of provincial Senior Years ESL courses for newcomer and international students
- provincial guidelines for the provision of ESL and educational services for international students

2. The Department work collaboratively with schools, Aboriginal organizations, and communities to address the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners by
   - establishing a provincial group to undertake research and study the linguistic diversity of Manitoba's Aboriginal student population and ESD issues, to develop a school and teacher support document on Aboriginal linguistic diversity and best instructional and programming practices. This would include collecting and analyzing relevant student data, reviewing literature, consulting with schools, and gathering examples of best practices in Manitoba and other jurisdictions.
   - developing culturally appropriate and relevant ESL programming resources and supports, especially with regard to the development of an Early Years screening protocol or instrument for assessing the linguistic diversity of Aboriginal learners
   - encouraging and supporting school divisions in developing Aboriginal Academic Achievement initiatives to address the ESL, ESD, and Aboriginal languages learning needs of Aboriginal learners
3. The Department clarify what programming and support ESL funding may be used for, and explore the feasibility of enhancing funding for ESL programming over the next several years by
   - extending the length of time for which students may be eligible for funding
   - increasing funding available in the first year of a student's eligibility

- establishing a multi-period reporting process for eligible ESL students
- establishing an ESL Newcomers (Innovations) Support Grant to encourage the development and implementation of programming for newcomer "high needs" ESL learners of refugee and war-affected backgrounds who have limited school experience, academic gaps, and limited first language literacy
- establishing a provincial ESL learner database to facilitate the assessment and monitoring of ESL learners

4. The Department require school divisions to have formal divisional or school ESL policies and/or protocol documents, and encourage the inclusion of ESL in divisional and school plans.

5. The Department provide ESL consultant services to support school divisions and Independent schools in developing divisional/school ESL policies, programming protocols, and programming models, and in implementing ESL reception and monitoring protocols and processes.

6. The Department encourage school divisions to take other initiatives to support planning and local capacity building of divisional ESL protocols, such as creating teacher professional development networks, developing resource and materials collections, and establishing ESL specialist positions.

7. The Department collaborate with Manitoba Labour and Immigration, settlement agencies, school divisions, and schools to enhance interpretation and first language assessment capacity.

8. The Department collaborate with partner organizations to enhance opportunities for professional development related to ESL and anti-racism/multicultural education, and to encourage faculties of education to better prepare future teachers for working with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

9. The Department collaborate with the Department of Labour and Immigration, and school divisions and schools to develop divisional and school-based initiatives to support the initial reception and settlement of newcomer students. This may include strengthening the relationships with settlement officers in schools, developing a newcomer educational and language profile, delivering professional learning opportunities with respect to refugee and war-affected students, and producing multilingual parent support documents.

10. The Departments of Advanced Education and Training, and Labour and Immigration, in collaboration with the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, establish a working group to develop a provincial strategy for enhancing the ESL and training/educational opportunities of adult ESL learners and late entry newcomers, who may need to meet Manitoba's Senior Years graduation requirements.

11. The Department establish an advisory committee to provide advice and feedback regarding the development and implementation of the action plan.

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